

Paramedic Students' Experiences Towards Online Learning During the Covid-19 Pandemic: A Qualitative Descriptive Study

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Background:

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted education, necessitating a massive shift towards digital learning. As a result, healthcare, medical and nursing education have had to swiftly transfer and adapt to online (OL) instruction despite the substantial challenges this has presented, given that healthcare education involves crucial hands-on skills, laboratory practice and clinical experience. Previous research investigated healthcare students' experiences with online learning for various healthcare professions during the COVID-19 pandemic; however, scarce evidence was found for the population of paramedic students. Therefore, this study aimed to explore the paramedic students' experiences with online learning during COVID-19, particularly by examining their facilitators and barriers to this new learning modality.

Objectives:

This study has two intended outcomes. First, instructors and stakeholders will gain increased insights regarding students' OL experiences and identify the facilitators and barriers to their learning to initiate additional improvements. As a result, the instructional methods, learner competency and patients' safety might be enhanced. Second, the students will be able to examine their strengths and weaknesses using this new learning method and suggest future improvements.

Methods:

A qualitative descriptive design was adopted to explore paramedic students' experiences with online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. Purposive sampling was utilized to recruit six students in the eastern region of Saudi Arabia. Data collection employed in-depth, semi-structured virtual interviews, which were audiotaped and transcribed verbatim. Braun and Clarke's reflexive thematic analysis was then used for data analysis.

Results:

Eight main themes and four sub-themes were explored from the data. The main themes were: unfamiliarity requiring quick adaptation; lack of infrastructure hindering e-learning; troublesome learning clinical skills virtually; problematic communications within the online realm; difficulty maintaining active learning; online learning allows more flexibility and time; using e-tools effectively; and adapting blended learning approach. The analysis explored valuable findings regarding these students' learning facilitators and barriers alongside their suggestions for future improvements.

Conclusion:

The study's findings provide crucial information for educators and stakeholders to improve online learning and ensure education quality that, in turn, could contribute to safer patient care. These findings may also help authorities understand students' online learning experiences and better prepare them for this mode of learning.

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